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SUBJECT: CODEL LEE VISIT TO CUBA

¶1. SUMMARY: A CODEL led by Rep. Barbara Lee (D-CA) visited Cuba April 3 - 7. The CODEL met with GOC officials including former President Fidel Castro, President Raul Castro, Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez, National Assembly President Ricardo Alarcon, and with the wives of the 5 Cuban agents currently incarcerated in the U.S. The CODEL also visited a bio-medical production center, the Latin American Medical School, and several churches on Palm Sunday. The delegation met with senior USINT staff at the beginning of the trip, and came to the Section for a "meet and greet" session with US and Cuban employees. The CODEL's focus was on improving bilateral relations between the U.S. and Cuba. President Raul Castro told the delegation that he favored bilateral talks without preconditions and that nothing would be off the table. End Summary.

¶2. A congressional delegation led by Rep. Barbara Lee (D-CA) and including Rep. Mel Watt (D-NC), Rep. Emanuel Cleaver (D-MO), Rep. Bobby Rush (D-IL), Rep. Marcia Fudge (D-OH), Rep. Laura Richardson (D-CA), and Rep. Mike Honda (D-CA) visited Cuba from April 3 until April 7. Due to an illness in his family, Rep. Honda was forced to depart on April 5. Ellen Bernstein of the U.S. NGO Pastors for Peace accompanied the CODEL on most of its appointments.

¶3. During the visit, the CODEL participated in meetings with Cuban government officials including National Assembly President Ricardo Alarcon, Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez, Minister of Foreign Trade Rodrigo Malmierca, and Pedro Alvarez of ALIMPORT, the food importation parastatal. The delegation also met with wives and other family members of the five Cuban intelligence agents currently imprisoned in the U.S. Delegation members took part in a ceremony at the Martin Luther King Center in Havana and split up to attend, and in some cases speak at, several different church services on Palm Sunday. They also visited a bio-medical production facility and the Latin American Medical School (ELAM) to meet with U.S. students. All of these meetings were arranged by the GOC without USINT participation. At our request, the CODEL also came to the Interests Section on April 6 for a "meet and greet" session with US and Cuban employees. There was no formal agenda for the "meet and greet," so the Members were able to mingle and converse with many Section staff. Following the "meet and greet," the CODEL went with the COM to his office and had a chance to see USINT's Billboard close up.

¶4. In addition to the scheduled events, the delegation had a four and a half hour meeting with Cuban President Raul Castro on April 6, and a meeting with former President Fidel Castro on April 7.

¶5. The CODEL's visit opened with a discussion on US-Cuba relations with senior USINT staff on April 3. Rep. Lee defined the goal of the delegation as trying to open channels of communication between the two governments. COM noted that USINT has attempted to communicate with the GOC at several levels but has not gotten a response. Rep. Lee and the other members of the delegation promised to raise that issue in their contacts with Cuban officials. COM also requested that the CODEL raise the specific issue of exit visas for Cuban

students selected to receive scholarships in the U.S., recalling that the USG facilitates the travel to Cuba of U.S. students who benefit from the GOC's scholarship program. Rep. Lee reported in her outbrief with COM that she had raised this issue on several occasions.

¶ 6. Although not fixed on the original schedule, the April 6 meeting with President Raul Castro occupied the largest block of time. CODEL comments on the meeting matched those reported in the Cuban and international press. Raul Castro told the CODEL he was willing to sit down with the U.S. without preconditions as long as Cuban sovereignty is respected. He said that no topic for discussion is off the table. Rep. Lee reported that CODEL members suggested several possibly controversial subjects and Castro simply repeated that nothing was off of the table. The meeting with former President Fidel Castro took place after the CODEL had already departed for its last appointment (at the ELAM) en route to the airport. Therefore, post has no information on what was discussed.

¶ 7. CODEL members reported that their GOC interlocutors repeated the same talking points at each meeting. These were: that the U.S. should lift the embargo, that it should provide visas to all of the spouses of the five agents, and that the USINT billboard is an impediment to better relations. CUBINT chief Bolanos took part in the meeting between the CODEL and President Raul Castro and complained about travel restrictions limiting his staff to DC (sic). Since COM had told the CODEL that we had proposed lifting the restrictions mutually several months ago, Rep. Lee said she thought that working with the restrictions on the respective interests sections might be some low hanging fruit for improved relations.

¶ 8. The CODEL made itself available to the press each morning and had a large press conference on April 7. As a result, the visit was covered extensively in both the Cuban and international press.

¶ 9. The CODEL did not clear this message before departure.

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